



# San Diego City Attorney **MICHAEL J. AGUIRRE**

## **NEWS RELEASE**

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: September 29, 2005**

Contact: Maria Velasquez, Communications Director: (619) 235-5725 (pager & voicemail) mvelasquez@saniego.gov  
San Diego Police Department: Dave Cohen, Public Information Officer (619) 531-2675

### **COMMUNITY COURT HEADED TO THE BEACH** *\$200,000 Federal Grant Awarded to the City Attorney's Office to Fund Beach Area Community Court*

**San Diego, CA:** A \$200,000 federal grant has been awarded by the U.S. Department of Justice to the City Attorney's Neighborhood Prosecution Unit (NPU) to fund the Beach Area Community Court for the next two years. The grant will support continuation of the Unit's pilot program, which offers first-time offenders in the beach area an opportunity to avoid a criminal conviction by performing neighborhood services in the beach communities where they have offended. The announcement will be made at this evening's Beach Area Community Court Planning Committee meeting in Mission Beach.

"Of the ten demonstration sites selected nationwide for the grant funding, the San Diego City Attorney's Office is the only one located in California," said City Attorney Michael Aguirre. "It is a great honor for the hard working staff of the Neighborhood Prosecution Unit and our partner the San Diego Police Department. It is a testament to their successful introduction of similar community courts in downtown San Diego and in Mid-City."

[ The San Diego City Attorney's Neighborhood Prosecution Unit was selected as one of ten demonstration site grantees for the FY 2005 Community-Based Problem-Solving Criminal Justice Initiative, funded by the U.S. Department of Justice, Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Bureau of Justice Assistance (BJA). According to BJA officials, "Research has demonstrated that, if implemented properly, the problem-solving approach can decrease recidivism, reduce crime, improve coordination among justice agencies, enhance services to victims, and increase trust in the justice system."

The Beach Area Community Court is a prosecutorial diversion program. Offenders participate in a community impact panel to educate them on how their criminal behavior affects the surrounding community and then complete community service in the beach area. If the offender completes the entire program, he or she avoids a criminal conviction.

"Because of the large volume of misdemeanor and infraction citations that we issue in our beach communities, this area was selected as the next location to implement a community court," said San Diego Police Chief Bill Lansdowne.

(MORE)

The target areas are Pacific Beach, Mission Beach, and Mission Bay Park. Based on San Diego Police Department statistics, these communities have a high number of alcohol-related infractions and misdemeanors including possession of open alcohol containers, urinating in public, fire ring violations, and disturbing the peace. These types of offenses can be effectively addressed through a community court.

The grant award provides funding over a two-year period for various components of the Beach Area Community Court, including a community court coordinator, community work service supervision, an alcohol assessment, staff costs, and equipment

The Beach Area Community Court Pilot Program was launched this past summer by the San Diego City Attorney's Office and the San Diego Police Department (SDPD) in partnership with the California Department of Alcoholic Beverage Control, the San Diego County Office of the Public Defender, San Diego Superior Court, Discover Pacific Beach, and the communities of Mission Beach, Mission Bay, and Pacific Beach.

In 2004, there were 8,920 citations issued by SDPD for misdemeanors and infractions in the beach area, and there were 2,041 arrests. Over 4,000 citations issued by SDPD in the beach area in 2004 were for possessing open alcohol containers, so this violation became a focus of the Beach Area Community Court Pilot Program.

The first Beach Area Community Court Pilot Program session was held in August for those 26 criminal offenders who voluntarily participated in the program in order to address their qualifying citations. The community impact panel for the Pilot Program was comprised of three community members, a business owner, a hospital trauma manager, and a San Diego Police Department Beach Team Sergeant. After the community impact panel, offenders participated in a community clean-up in the beach area for three hours, which was organized and supervised by Discover Pacific Beach, the local business improvement association.

For the Pilot Program, SDPD's Beach Team provided informational flyers to 98 offenders who were issued qualifying citations during two weekend shifts in July. The offenders were given the option of completing the community court program in order to avoid a criminal conviction. Of the 98 offenders, 26 participated in the Pilot Program (22 males and 4 females). Most participants were under the age of 30.

Tonight's Beach Area Community Court Planning Committee meeting will be held at 6:30 p.m. at the Santa Clara Recreation Center located in Mission Beach at 1008 Santa Clara Place. The meeting is free and open to the public. The following individuals will be attending tonight's meeting: Angie Reddish-Day, Head of the City Attorney's Neighborhood Prosecution Unit; Benjamin Nicholls, Executive Director of Discover Pacific Beach, and residents from the surrounding communities of Mission Bay, Mission Beach and Pacific Beach.

**Note: Interviews with the City Attorney's Neighborhood Prosecution Unit and community supporters in the beach area are available prior to tonight's meeting.**

##